MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COMMISSION OF FINE ARTS
17 November 1965

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MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COMMISSION OF FINE ARTS
HELD IN WASHINGTON, D.C.

I. CONVENE, ROOM 7000, INTERIOR DEPARTMENT BUILDING

The second session of the regular monthly meeting of the Commission of Fine Arts was held in the office of the Interior Department Building on 17 November 1965, at 9:30 a.m., with Chairman William Walton presiding.

Present were: William Walton
Gordon Bunshaft
Aline Saarinen
Hideo Sasaki

Staff: C.H. Atherton, Secretary
Donald Myer, Asst. Secy
Nancee Black, Legislative Asst.
Myra Younker, Editor

NCPC: Arnall Connell

Recorder: Leone M. Vialpando

II. INTERVIEWS

1. General Services Administration, Public Buildings Service

a. U.S. Labor Department Building - Proposed Design

Mr. Karel Yasko and Mr. J. Rowland Snyder, General Services Administration, Mr. Llewelyn Pitts, Mr. Brooks and Mr. Keahey, architects, attended the meeting during the discussion of this project.

Mr. Pitts read from a letter to General Services Administration that portion which stated his architectural firm's opinion of the building as being architecturally, structurally, and mechanically feasible as an air-rights building and retaining the total requirements of space specified for this project. He then discussed the plan stating that along Constitution Avenue the building would be under the 90 foot height limitation. The center and rear sections of the plan were within the height restriction for those areas. The narrower center section, with plaza areas planned for each side, was intended to relate to an east-west axis along C Street as proposed in the Pennsylvania Avenue Plan.

Mr. Bunshaft commented that the two large masses should be aligned with the District Courts Building and Municipal Building to the west. He expressed the members' views that another site should be found for the U.S. Tax Court building, freeing the space for the Labor Department Building. Extending the north section of this building over 2nd and 3rd Streets,

this section could be reduced one story. Continuing to speak for the Commission, he commended the architects on their efforts to keep the building low.

The Secretary prepared a letter for the Chairman's signature to the Director, General Services Administration, expressing the Commission's approval, in general, of the proposed design with the recommendation concerning the center section and a request that further detailed studies be submitted as developed. EXHIBIT A

b. U.S. Tax Court Building - Proposed Design

Mr. Karel Yasko and Mr. J. Rowland Snyder, General Services Administration, Mr. Victor Lundy and Mr. William Lyles, architects, and Judge Gray of the U.S. Tax Court attended the meeting during the discussion of this project.

Mr. Lundy explained his concept of the design and details of the plan for the U.S. Tax Court building as requested by the members. Attempting to make a "dynamic" and a "living" relationship, in his words, between the shape of this building and the adjacent Home Owners Loan Corporation building, he sited the building so that the front would be directed toward Pennsylvania Avenue. The shape of the apparently thin building was dependent on the Washington climate which he thought was hot and required a building suggesting a feeling of shade and relief from the brightness and glare around it. Squeezed in between the HOLC building and the proposed Labor Department building, this structure would have spaces for court rooms, cafeterias, etc., below ground level and offices for the attorneys and staff, studies and library areas, above ground. The judges chambers would be on the top floor.

Mrs. Saarinen remarked that any justification based largely on climate conditions of Washington was weak. The design had no apparent relationship to other buildings in the area or to the total city of Washington.

Mr. Bunshaft compared the design of the building to a piece of large sculpture which eventually becomes some type of building. He felt the building unrelated to its context in all respects.

Mr. Sasaki commented on the difficult site which he considered a "medieval space" in a classical city. Given a larger site, the sculptural form of the building might benefit from more space, he remarked.

Chairman Walton stated that the Commission's legal function was to protect the classical architectural heritage established in the city. The design was inappropriate for Washington and the site, unsuitable for a

building, especially a Court building.

Mr. Yasko agreed that this project was not for this small, compact site. He reiterated the Commission's recommendation that the Court should be located in its own setting.

Judge Fay explained the function of the court and the plan of the building in relation to that function. He agreed with the Commission's recommendation that the Court should have a more spacious and dignified setting.

The Secretary prepared a letter for the Commission's signature to the Director, General Services Administration, expressing the members' disapproval of the site and design.

EXHIBIT B

c. Federal Bureau of Investigation Building - Revised Design (transferred from the previous day).

Mr. Yasko and Mr. Snyder, General Services, Mr. Carter H. Manny, Jr., and Mr. Stanislav Gladych, architects, Mr. Nathaniel A. Owings, and Mr. John Woodbridge, temporary Pennsylvania Avenue Commission, attended the meeting during the discussion of this project. Models were used to illustrate the changes in the design.

Mr. Manny explained the changes made as suggested by the Commission during the October meeting. A solid base with only one entrance way was designed for the area facing Pennsylvania Avenue. The large mass surmounting the roof of the building was narrower, elongated and extended toward E Street. The projections on E Street were, however, eliminated.

Mr. Gladych discussed the structural system for the revised rear area. The basic grid of the construction (30 x 30) had been changed tentatively to 45 x 45 which would require additional study by engineers. This change resulted in center column spacing which appeared to bring the whole complex together, he felt.

Mr. Owings expressed the desire to have the base treated as a tray with open areas below containing gardens, fountains, etc. He felt it should not appear as a podium constructed of masonry, or concrete. Because of the security aspects of the FBI, a grill with gates would be required, Mr. Yasko commented.

Although pleased with the progress made especially the E Street elevations the members felt that continued study should be made of the base or tray adjacent to Pennsylvania Avenue. The suggestions of Mr. Owings should be considered. Models incorporating his idea and one with the

recommendations of the Commission should be submitted for review.

The Secretary prepared a letter for the Chairman's signature to the Director, General Services Administration, expressing the members' request that further studies be made of the base along Pennsylvania Avenue.

EXHIBIT C

2. District of Columbia Government, Department of Buildings and Grounds

a. Replacement of Engine Co. No. 15, 14th and V Sts., S.E. - Revised Design

b. Emery Elementary School Replacement, Lincoln Road and S St., N.E. - Revised Design

c. Blair-Ludlow Elementary School Replacement, 6th and G Sts, N.E.- Proposed Design

During the previous session, the members requested that the architects of the above projects be notified of the Commission's approval and recommendations of the designs they submitted. The Commission's action would be reported to Mr. Purcell, District of Columbia Government, Department of Buildings and Grounds, who would be attending the meeting on the following day. The excellent design and site plan for the Blair-Ludlow Elementary School were mentioned to Mr. Purcell at this time. The members commended Mr. Purcell on obtaining an outstanding design for this school and also mentioned the excellent design by Lyles, Bissett, Carlisle and Wolff, architects, for an elementary school at 11th and Kenyon Streets, N.W. which was submitted during the October meeting.

d. Brent Elementary School Replacement, 3rd and D Streets, S.E. - Proposed Design

Mr. Purcell, Department of Buildings and Grounds, Mr. Johannes and Mr. Murray, architects, attended the meeting during the discussion of this project.

At the request of Chairman Walton, Mr. Sasaki expressed the members' views on the proposed design for this school. He stated that the school should be reoriented to take advantage of Folger Park to the west. To reorient the school would not require major changes in the basic plan of the school and could be made although the existing school would be retained until construction of the new building was completed. Raising the classroom element on stilts to obtain more play area was not objectionable. Mrs. Saarinen continued by stating the members' preference that brick be used on the facade in place of terra cotta tile.

Mr. Johannes and Mr. Murray defended their site plan explaining that the school oriented toward the park provided a view for only half of the classrooms while the remaining rooms would look over back yards of adjacent houses. Another problem they had considered was that less area would be available for the playground. Mr. Purcell mentioned that chain link fences around playgrounds are required in the District of Columbia. Raising the classroom wing would obtain more play areas.

The members requested that the site plan and the treatment of the facade be restudied.

The Secretary prepared a letter for the Chairman's signature to the Engineer Commissioner for the District of Columbia reporting the members' action. EXHIBIT D

e. Woodson Senior High School, 55th and Eads Street, N.E. - Proposed Design

Mr. Purcell, Department of Buildings and Grounds, Mr. McLeod, and Mr. Ensign, architects, attended the meeting during the discussion of this building.

Mr. Sasaki led the discussion by commenting on the Commission's suggestion made during the October meeting that the tower element be disengaged from the general mass, and remarking that the design submitted indicated two masses of contrasting proportions, a fat element on a podium. He thought that the tower portion should be sunken below grade approximately half a story with the roof treated as a terrace, or completely submerge the lower element and have only the tower structure above grade.

Mr. Purcell remarked that high water table conditions might prevent construction of the lower (base) portion below grade. Mr. McLeod commented on the circulation problem envolving escalators, stairs and possibly some elevators which resulted in the design presented rather than a clearer tower element. Mr. Ensign explained the motif at the top of the taller element which was functional, enclosing the exhaust pipes for all laboratories.

In view of the various problems, Mr. Bunshaft suggested that a design of two buildings - possibly 5 and 8 stories or of even heights - with connecting bridges be studied. The motif at the top should be eliminated or designed more simply. In the design presented, the columns connecting the higher element with the low flat podium were unnecessary.

The Secretary prepared a letter for the Chairman's signature to the Engineer Commissioner for the District of Columbia stating the members' disapproval of the design submitted and requested that the project be restudied. EXHIBIT E

3. Freer Gallery of Art

Inspection of Proposed Acquisitions

In accordance with custom and at the request of Dr. Pope, Director of the Freer Gallery of Art, Chairman Walton was designated by the members to inspect and approve works of art proposed for purchase.

The meeting adjourned at 11:50 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

C Atherton

C. H. Atherton
Secretary

1 December 1965

Dear Mr. Knott:

At its meeting on November 16th the Commission of Fine Arts considered feasibility studies for the construction of a Labor Department Building over the center leg of the Inner Loop Freeway between 2nd and 3rd Streets, N.W., just north of Constitution Avenue.

This building, the Commission recognizes, will obviously be one of the more important buildings in the monumental core of Washington along with the new Air Museum and the Forrestal Building spanning 10th Street, S.W. The magnitude of the program demands an extremely large structure and the fact that it is spanning a roadway, a new concept in Federal building, presents problems that are unique to this situation. Also the proximity to the foot of the Capitol raises an added problem, for this is the last major building to front on and enclose the Mall. We are therefore particularly concerned about how the bulk and mass of the proposed structure would fit in so as to compliment its surroundings and to respect in every way this important location.

Along these lines the Commission recommended an important change that would, in their opinion, integrate the proposed building with its setting to a much greater degree. The large mass to the north of the central structure should be elongated, that is, narrowed and extended over both 2nd and 3rd Streets, forming a balanced axis as seen from D Street, especially in the area in front of the Municipal and Federal District Courts buildings. By so doing, this arrangement would also provide a definite visual stop looking north from the Mall and in addition to the formal settings at the ends of D Street would possibly afford the opportunity to reduce the large rear mass by at least one story. We recognize that on the east of the site

EXHIBIT A

this would require the Labor Department Building to extend into what is now considered the site of the U.S. Tax Court Building. As you know, however, the Commission of Fine Arts feels that the space reserved for the Tax Court is totally unsuitable in terms of its surroundings and inadequate size. Therefore, we feel that our proposals regarding the Labor Department Building are reasonable.

The architects appeared to be enthusiastic about the proposals and will present new studies at the earliest opportunity.

There may, of course, be some difficulty in acquiring extended air rights over Second and Third Streets. If there is anything we can do to make the going easier please let us know.

For the Commission of Fine Arts:

Sincerely yours,

William Walton
Chairman

Honorable Lawson B. Knott
Administrator
General Services Administration
Washington, D. C.

30 November 1965

Dear Mr. Knott:

At its meeting on November 15, the Commission of Fine Arts considered the proposed design for the U.S. Tax Court Building at Indiana Avenue and Second Street, N.W.

The Commission finds it difficult to understand how a project of this importance could go so far awry at such an early stage. First and foremost, the site is totally inadequate. Not only is it cramped in size, but is an odd shaped piece of ground directly abutting the rear end of a building which was never designed to be seen. In our opinion it would be almost impossible, even with a great deal of ingenuity on the part of the architect, to develop a satisfactory solution for the program given this context.

Apart from the site, however, there was little excuse for the architect's apparent disregard of the character of the Capital. It was clear in his presentation, in fact, that he had made a deliberate attempt to strike out into an area of his own personal expression with little reference to the traditions of Washington. This approach may be justified in some cities but not here. Obviously we are not saying that tradition has to be interpreted literally in design, but there are certain elements classic in nature that have been common to the roots of the plan and the development of the city over a long period of time. Under no circumstances could we ever accept the architect's arguments for a departure from these general principles.

We recommend that a completely new start be made, both on selection of site and on basic approach to an architectural solution for the program. Our next meeting will be on December 16th and 17th and we will be happy to discuss this matter further at that time.

For the Commission of Fine Arts:

Sincerely yours,

William Walton
Chairman

Honorable Lawson B. Knott
Administrator
General Services Administration
Washington, D. C.

EXHIBIT B

1 December 1965

Dear Mr. Knott:

This is to keep you up to date on progress of the F.B.I. Headquarters Building.

We have asked the architects to continue with further studies, especially along the Pennsylvania Avenue elevation at sidewalk level. The architects have had some difficulty in arriving at a satisfactory base for the building and at the same time trying to meet the aims of the Pennsylvania Avenue Commission to incorporate an open and interesting space along the sidewalk.

These additional studies will be considered at our meeting on December 17.

For the Commission of Fine Arts:

Sincerely yours,

William Walton
Chairman

Mr. Lawson B. Knott
Administrator
General Services Administration
Washington, D. C.

EXHIBIT C.

30 November 1965

Dear General Duke:

At its meeting on November 16th the Commission of Fine Arts considered the Brent Elementary School Replacement at 3rd and D Streets, S.E.

One of the overriding considerations of this school is the formal design of Folger Park lying immediately to the west of the school site. This is one of the few parks in Southeast Washington that is well landscaped and surrounded by houses with an architectural character that is unified, yet the layout of the school on the site failed to recognize this fact. The main classroom wing was oriented 90° to the direction of the park, facing out on 3rd Street and North Carolina Avenue respectively, thus presenting a narrow end of the building rather than facing the park. The Commission felt strongly that despite the existing school, which imposed certain limitations on the architect, it still would be perfectly possible to reorient the building without major changes to the basic plan elements of the school. We therefore would like to see further studies of the plan with the classroom wing facing the park and the supplementary wing containing all purpose and service areas to the rear on the east.

The Commission also felt that the treatment of the facade was somewhat forced in trying to achieve a verticality with a structural expression that basically was suited to a horizontal building. The Commission sees no objection to raising the classroom wing on stilts but by trying to achieve a strong vertical character a certain artificiality was introduced into the facades. We hope this element of the design can be given further study.

We have asked the staff to work closely with you and the architects in this new study. In the event it is prepared prior to the next meeting of the Commission, which is to be held on December 16th and 17th, we would be happy to view it at that time.

For the Commission of Fine Arts:

Sincerely yours,

William Walton
Chairman

Brigadier General C. M. Duke
Engineer Commissioner for the
District of Columbia
District Building
Washington, D.C. 20004

EXHIBIT D

30 November 1965

Dear General Duke:

At its meeting on November 16th the Commission of Fine Arts reviewed further studies of the new Woodson Senior High School at 55th and Eads Streets, N.E.

We were disappointed to see that there had been no attempt to consider some of the recommendations we had made at our last meeting. The Commission still feels the tower element of this high rise school is poorly situated in relation to the lower mass. This is admittedly a difficult problem because the program dictates a large number of spaces which do not fit into a repetitive module, that is, gymnasium, cafeteria, swimming pool, shops, etc., and therefore do not lend themselves to treatment and incorporation into the tower structure. Nevertheless, the Commission feels that given the relatively smaller size of the tower elements a better solution could be had by locating the tower to one side of the lower elements. We understand that such studies had been prepared but that somehow the architects did not choose to submit them at this time. We would still like to have the opportunity to review these schemes at our next meeting and to discuss what the architects consider to be some of the overriding problems of this particular approach. The design of this school offers an exciting opportunity to do something new in the city of Washington and we are most anxious to see that the best possible design will evolve.

The next meeting of the Commission is Scheduled for December 16 and 17 and we would like to meet with the architects at that time.

For the Commission of Fine Arts:

Sincerely yours,

William Walton
Chairman

Brigadier General C. M. Duke
Engineer Commissioner for the
District of Columbia
District Building
Washington, D. C.

EXHIBIT E

MEETING OF THE COMMISSION OF FINE ARTS
17 November 1965

AM

9:30 I. CONVENE, Room 7000, INTERIOR DEPARTMENT BUILDING

II. INTERVIEWS

9:35 1. General Services Administration, Public Buildings Service

a. U.S. Tax Court - Proposed Design

(Mr. Yasko, Mr. Snyder, GSA, PBS; Mr. Victor Lundy and Mr. William Lyles, architects)

b. Labor Department Building - Proposed Design

(Mr. Yasko, Mr. Snyder; Mr. Llewelyn Pitts, architect)

11:00 2. District of Columbia Government, Department of Buildings and Grounds

a. Replacement of Engine Co. No. 15, 14th and V Sts., S.E. - Revised Design

(Mr. G.A. Purcell, Liaison Officer, Dept. of Buildings and Grounds; Mr. Clark T. Harmon, Architect)

b. Emery Elementary School Replacement, Lincoln Road & S St., N.E. - Revised Design

(Mr. Purcell; Mr. Ronald S. Senseman, Architect)

c. Blair-Ludlow Elementary School Replacement, 6th and G Sts., N.E. - Proposed Design

(Mr. Purcell; representative of Keyes, Lethbridge & Condon)

d. Brent Elementary School Replacement, 3rd and D Sts., S.E. - Proposed Design

(Mr. Purcell; representative of Johannes and Murray)

e. Woodson Senior High School, 55th & Eads Sts., N.E. - Proposed Design

(Mr. Purcell; representative of McLeod and Ferrara)

12:00 3. Freer Gallery of Art

Inspection of Proposed Acquisitions